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SUBJECT: MFA A/S-EQUIVALENT PESSIMISTIC ON TURKEY-EU TRAIN
WRECK, RUSSIA

REF: A. ANKARA 6037

[1](#)B. ANKARA 5976

[1](#)C. PARIS POINTS OF 10/20/06

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Classified By: PolMC Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (B & D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: MFA A/S-equivalent for European Union affairs Gilles Briatta told us October 20 that Turkey understood that the French National Assembly's passage of legislation criminalizing denial of the Armenian "genocide" was only a first parliamentary step, and that Turkey had managed the issue responsibly in a way to avoid, at least for the time being, any lasting damage to bilateral relations. That said, this and other issues such as Turkey-Cyprus were increasingly susceptible to electoral -- read, nationalist -- interpretations in all three countries and were limiting governments' margins for maneuver. Briatta was pessimistic that the EU would succeed in avoiding a "train wreck" on the November 8 report on Turkish implementation of its Ankara Protocol obligations, although he held out the possibility of "failure with hope" that would demonstrate that progress was still possible, and argued that achieving a "temporary" agreement was not an insurmountable challenge per se. He foresaw several scenarios in the event of failure, from freezing of current chapters under discussion to complete suspension of accession negotiations for an unspecified period; France would support a "reaction," although he said it had not yet determined what that should be.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY CONT: Briatta predicted that the EU's current enlargement fatigue would persist, believed a "mini" treaty on institutional reforms might still be possible by the end of the 2008 French presidency (and that France would want to move quickly), and saw energy policy -- probably through small coalitions of like-minded member states -- as the next EU policy frontier. In that regard, he asserted that Russia remained "the vital issue" for Europe, while lamenting the near-impossibility of member states' finding consensus on almost any issue affecting Russia. END SUMMARY.

Turkish reaction to Armenian "genocide" legislation

[1](#)3. (C) MFA A/S-equivalent for European Affairs Gilles Briatta began the October 20 meeting with PolMC and POL Deputy by indicating that he had traveled to Ankara October 10 to inform the Turks that the National Assembly with near-certainty would vote to approve legislation criminalizing denial of the Armenian "genocide." At the same time, he had sought to reassure them that this was only a

first step, and that prospects for passage by the Senate were far less certain. Although the Turks had responded with "execrable humor," Briatta was pleased that they had so far taken no concrete retaliatory steps, thanks largely to the deft management of FM Gul, who had been careful to use the "conditional" tense with respect to potential future retaliatory measures in the event of final passage of the legislation. Briatta believed that the worst was over for the time being.

A domestic and foreign-policy issue

14. (C) Briatta noted the GOF's genuine concern, shared by French companies who are heavily invested in Turkey, about the damage to bilateral relations that would ensue if the law were promulgated -- mainly retaliation against French businesses. But the Armenian community had proved far more effective than business in lobbying parliamentarians (he complained that business engaged only after the law had been passed); above all, French deputies were preoccupied with their reelection prospects in the upcoming presidential and legislative elections and were reluctant to alienate half a million voters. Briatta expressed some confidence that the Senate, which he said traditionally attached more importance to protection of freedom of expression, would take a dimmer view of criminalizing denial of the "genocide." He indicated there was also a possibility that the Constitutional Council would find the legislation, at least as currently written, unconstitutional. If the Council did become involved, however, this would carry with it the risk that the existing law criminalizing denial of the Holocaust might also be overturned, a potential outcome of much more gravity to the degree that it would touch on France's attempts to come to terms with its own history. PolMC asked, in such a circumstance, whether the Constitutional Council would question only the criminalization of denial of the Holocaust and/or Armenian "genocide", or go so far as to rule unconstitutional the laws recognizing the two. Briatta responded that, while both outcomes were possible, he judged

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that only the criminalization legislation would be affected.

Pessimistic on avoiding a "train wreck"

15. (C) Returning to Turkey, Briatta expressed satisfaction that, in this "delicate phase," Turkey had so far lived up to its European aspirations by reacting responsibly -- although this could change after November 8. Asked if this were grounds for optimism that a "train wreck" on Turkey-Cyprus could be avoided, however, Briatta judged there were only very meager chances that an agreement among the different parties, based on the Finnish proposals, would be reached. He noted that, although Brussels had that same day approved assistance to northern Cyprus, five-six member states had voted against the package. And while France had in this instance voted for/for the assistance, this did not change the fact that there were all kinds of "baroque" legal situations that inevitably stemmed from Turkey's illegal occupation of the northern part of the island. To cite an example, France had supported Cypriot attempts to block EU funding for "public property" projects in Northern Cyprus, on the grounds that, in the strict legal sense, public property was tied to recognized governments.

16. (C) PolMC asked whether the Cypriots appreciated the strategic importance of keeping Turkey engaged with Europe and not closing the door completely. Briatta responded by regretting that increasingly -- in Turkey and Cyprus, but also in France -- national views were being driven by domestic electoral considerations. That said, he believed that Cypriot President Papadopoulos might be willing to allow others to restrain him (for example, "the UK made me do it"), and that Turkish PM Erdogan was trying to be reasonable. But one should never forget that, deep down, the Cypriots continued to view the Turks as "the enemy" given the

continuing military occupation of the north. Moreover, because Erdogan was mistrusted by the military, his own margin of maneuver vis-a-vis was small in general and on Cyprus in particular. Briatta judged that the tourism potential of northern Cyprus for all of Cyprus once unified, combined with the economic burden northern Cyprus represented for Turkey, offered the only real, albeit small, incentives for the Turks and Cypriots to compromise (in combination with agreement to open up its ports to Cypriot vessels).

¶7. (C) PolMC asked what would follow after November 8 in the event there was no agreement. Briatta responded that both sides would resort to their customary "blame game." The reality was that each side was already focused on determining how best to shift responsibility for failure to the other, and both fully expected that the feared collision would occur. They were reacting to the Finnish proposals positively enough only to demonstrate that they were acting in good faith, but nothing more. The only alternative he saw to complete failure was "failure with hope," i.e., something small that would provide the Finns, Turks and Cypriots with a fig leaf to claim that something -- he did not know what -- had started. Briatta said getting to an agreement was not rocket science: all that was required would be, on a temporary basis, for the Turks to open their ports while Cyprus opened Famagusta and perhaps Ercan airport. Varosha could be handed over to the Cypriots in stages. Where there was a will, there was a way.

Suspension scenarios

¶8. (C) Asked what would happen to accession negotiations in the event of failure, Briatta said there were a number of possible scenarios: one would be to suspend three chapters in the customs area (since they implicitly covered the ports issue); another would be to extend the freeze to agriculture and even industry (where he said the Turks had effectively achieved EU standards); a third outcome would be to suspend negotiations altogether, either for a shorter or a longer period. Anticipating PolMC's question, Briatta said France itself did not yet have a position; however, when we noted in the light of French positions of the recent past that it was likely to be severe, Briatta acknowledged that a reaction would not be lacking. That said, "no one" in the EU wanted a rupture in relations with Turkey, especially while Turkey was participating in UNIFIL.

Risks for France-Turkey relations

¶9. (C) Briatta lamented that a suspension in accession negotiations would likely damage France-Turkey relations, notwithstanding the GOF's abiding interest in a strong, close relationship. Evoking France's long history of good

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relations with Turkey, he stated that French and Turkish foreign policy "visions" were compatible, for instance on Iraq. Unfortunately, the French people were opposed to Turkish accession, and opening accession talks had led to new problems. The mutual attraction of yesteryear was being replaced with mutual suspicion; Turks were becoming convinced that the French "did not like them" any longer. Briatta regretted that France had disappointed Turkey, adding that France had an almost unrivalled cultural and business presence there that would take others "billions of dollars and about ten years" to duplicate. France had a lot to lose, especially with Turkish elites. Asked how Chirac was viewed, Briatta responded that the Turks had been surprised by Chirac's call while in Armenia for Turkish recognition of the "genocide," but that they generally recognized his contribution to good bilateral relations and harbored no animosity toward him personally.

EU institutional reforms

¶10. (C) Asked how the EU would confront its institutional

challenges over the next couple of years, Briatta referred to the first-half 2007 and last-half 2008 German and French presidencies and said France would want to move quickly after its May 2007 presidential elections. Given the time constraints involved, this suggested that, even if the center-left won the elections, the government had little choice but to proceed along the lines of Interior Minister and leading center-right presidential candidate Sarkozy's proposal for a "mini-treaty." Keeping the treaty small was also necessary in order to avoid having to submit it to ratification by popular referendum in France, where the results would be the same as in May 2005. While calling achievement of an agreement on a mini-treaty "not impossible," Briatta was nonetheless pessimistic that it could be ratified quickly. The UK wanted nothing at present, he said, and things would only get worse when Blair left. Ratification would be delicate in France even by parliamentary means. Europe had entered into a period of aimlessness. Asked if the EU constitutional treaty were to blame, Briatta responded that it only brought to the surface what was already the case.

Enlargement pause here to stay

¶11. (C) Noting that the EU had decided to take a breather away from enlargement, Briatta thought it significant that Commission President Barroso of all people had proposed a hiatus; this was not official Portuguese policy, he added. But Barroso had only said aloud what everyone was thinking quietly, and the fact that no voice had been raised to contradict him was itself telling. The criterion of the EU's absorptive capacity had taken hold across the EU and the European Parliament, even if this could have potentially negative implications for stabilizing the Balkans. Without saying so directly, Briatta implied there would be no further enlargements in the near future. (See also ref C discussion of French attitudes toward the UK and Russia.)

Energy and Russia

¶12. (C) Briatta predicted that energy issues would take on increasing importance in the EU. The crisis in Ukraine and rising petroleum prices had served as a wake-up call for the EU, although there was still no real common EU policy. He described French views on energy as similar to those of the UK, given their common interest in nuclear power, climate change, and their significant energy company investments in Russia. This was quite different from Germany, which had a strategic agreement with Russia. Briatta expressed understanding for the German position, noting that Germany had no big oil companies, no access to reserves, and therefore no choice. Moreover, German companies were in a panic about the prospects for insufficient electricity generation capacity when they shut down their nuclear plants in five years. Briatta suggested that, given differences among member states, energy policy would be coordinated initially among small, like-minded groups of member-states. He claimed this would actually be easy in the case of energy, given that the only requirement was to satisfy EU competition criteria.

¶13. (C) On Russia, Briatta repeated previous arguments that how to deal with it "was the only vital question" for Europe. Like it or not, he continued, "enlargement had put Russia at the heart of Europe." That said, he lamented that no one understood what it was that Russia wanted. Furthermore, Russia was the "one" issue on which the EU was completely

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divided -- even more than on Iraq in 2003 -- because each individual member state had its own history with and interests in Russia. He contrasted French desires for an alliance with the total mistrust of the Balts and the Poles. He noted that it was an emotional and historical problem in addition to a strategic one for nearly every member-state: France remembered Russia as a liberator, whereas others saw

Russia as an oppressor.

¶14. (C) As the meeting concluded, Briatta reiterated French interest in U.S.-Russian discussions on WTO accession. Asserting that France would do things differently if it could start over again with Russia on WTO, Briatta said he suspected the U.S. felt similarly about China.

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